

Message Text

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----- 049297

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE STATE 230279

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: BEXP, GB

SUBJECT: TRANSGABON RAILROAD -- RAILS, TIES

REF: (A) STATE 202482; (B) STATE 210450; (C) LIBREVILLE 1194;
(D) LIBREVILLE 1261; (E) LIBREVILLE 1292

1. FURTHER DISCUSSION WITH ALL THREE U.S. RAIL PRODUCERS
ELICITED NO REPEAT NO INTEREST SUPPLYING TRANSGABON OR
OTHER FOREIGN PROSPECTS OVER FORESEEABLE FUTURE. EXCEPTION-
ALLY STRONG DOMESTIC DEMAND RE RENOVATION U.S. RAILROADS
EXPECTED TO CONTINUE EXCEED VERY LIMITED DOMESTIC PRODUCTION
CAPACITY OVER BALANCE THIS DECADE.

2. STEEL CROSSTIES WOULD SEEM VERY DUBIOUS FROM STANDPOINT
TRANSGABON BEST INTERESTS, SINCE EXPERIMENTS WITH SUCH
ITEMS HAVE YET TO PROVE SUCCESSFUL. PRESTRESSED CONCRETE
TIES WOULD PROBABLY BE MORE FEASIBLE, BUT OCTRA SHOULD
REALIZE THAT THIS TECHNOLOGY HAS NOT BEEN WIDELY ACCEPTED
BY U.S. RAIL TRANSPORT OPERATORS, WHO STILL FIND CERTAIN
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VARIETIES WOOD ONLY VIABLE MATERIAL FOR MOST CROSSTIE
APPLICATIONS. WHILE CEMENT FOR MAKING CONCRETE CURRENTLY

PLENTIFUL IN U.S., REVERSION TO RECENT TIGHTNESS LIKELY SHOULD HOUSING CONSTRUCTION PICK UP (POSSIBLY IN 1976). BEFORE EXPLORING AVAILABILITY WITH INDIVIDUAL U.S. CONCRETE CROSSTIE PRODUCERS, COMMERCE SHOULD KNOW WHETHER BOTH SUPERVISORY ENGINEERS (TAMS GROUP) AND OCTRA ENGINEERS HAVE FULLY FOCUSED ON TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS CROSSTIES AND KNOW EXACTLY WHAT THEY SHOULD HAVE.

3. SINCERITY OCTRA'S STATED WISH GIVE AMERICAN FIRMS BIGGER PART IN SUPPLYING GOODS FOR TRANSGABON MIGHT WELL ELICIT A QUESTION OR TWO FROM MORRISON-KNUDSEN OR GENERAL ELECTRIC. WITH GLOBAL SHORTAGES STEEL (ESPECIALLY RAILS) AND CONCRETE, OCTRA UNDOUBTEDLY KNOWS IT WOULD DO U.S. NO BIG FAVOR ORDERING RAILS AND TIES.

4. NOTWITHSTANDING FOREGOING FACTORS, COMMERCE WILL FOLLOW RAIL SITUATION CLOSELY AND CHECK AGAIN WITH U.S. PRODUCERS SPECIFICALLY RE TRANSGABON REQUIREMENTS IF SITUATION EASES UP. EMBASSY WILL BE ADVISED PROMPTLY OF ANY DEVELOPMENTS. MEANWHILE, GABONESE SHOULD NOT, REPEAT NOT SEND MISSION TO U.S. WITH ANY EXPECTATION PLACING ORDERS FOR RAILS.

5. COMMERCE WILL APPROACH U.S. FIRMS RE CROSSTIES AS SOON AS OCTRA PROVIDES DEFINITIVE AND PROFESSIONALLY EVALUATED REQUIREMENTS, PLUS ASSURANCES THAT NO CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATION WOULD PRECLUDE SOURCING ELSEWHERE THAN ZAIRE.

6. OCTRA LETTER OCTOBER 9 (REF. E) TO EXIMBANK NOT YET RECEIVED. KISSINGER

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